

Remarks During a Briefing on Immigration Reform

June 26, 2007

Thank you all. Please be seated. Thanks for coming. Thanks for working on an immigration bill that's important for this country. I appreciate your efforts, and I appreciate your time.

I do want to thank Secretary Gutierrez and Secretary Chertoff for their hard work. One of the things I told Members of the Senate was that the administration is going to be involved in crafting a comprehensive bill that's good for the country. And I said, we're going to be more than just giving speeches or using the microphone to proclaim the need for a comprehensive bill. I would send two members plus our staff up to—two members of my Cabinet plus our staff up to work the—to work with the Senators.

And you guys have done a really good job. Thank you for your time. Thanks for your understanding of the complex, carefully crafted piece of legislation that is moving through the Senate. And you've done exactly what I asked you to do; that's why you're in the Cabinet. [*Laughter*] I appreciate you all helping work this bill through the Senate.

The first thing that we've got to recognize in the country is that the system isn't working. The immigration system needs reform. The status quo is unacceptable. Most Americans understand that. They say, "Well, we attempted to reform the system in 1986, and the reform didn't work." Our view is, if the status quo is unacceptable, we need to replace it with something that is acceptable and have been working toward that end with both Democrats and Republicans in the Senate. The reason on the Senate, of course, is that we'll be moving our attention to the House when the Senate passes a comprehensive piece of legislation.

I view this as an historic opportunity for Congress to act, for Congress to replace a system that is not working with one that we believe will work a lot better. In other words, this is a moment for people who have been elected to come together, focus on a problem, and show the American people that we can work together to fix the problem. If you dislike the status quo on immigration, then

you ought to be supporting a comprehensive approach to making sure the system works.

And it's a practical approach. The Senate has worked very hard to craft a comprehensive bill. In a good piece of legislation like this and a difficult piece of legislation like this, one side doesn't get everything they want. It's a careful compromise, and many of you have been involved with that compromise.

The problem that this bill recognizes—the bill recognizes that we got to address the problem in a comprehensive fashion. There are people who say, "Well, we've got to do more to protect our border." And they're right; we do have to do more to protect our border. And that's why this bill has a lot of border security measures that will help continue the strategy that we have been implementing over the past year. As a matter of fact, there's a \$4.4 billion direct deposit on enforcement measures. But it's important for our fellow citizens to understand that in order to enforce the border, there has to be a way for people to come to our country on a temporary basis to do work Americans aren't doing. Otherwise, they will continue to try to sneak in across the border.

And therefore, a second aspect of the comprehensive bill is one that addresses the economic needs of our country, and that is a temporary-worker program that will match foreign workers with jobs Americans aren't doing—and notice I say, "temporary-worker program." There are a lot of employers here in this country that worry about having a workforce that will be able to meet the demands and needs of a growing economy.

There are people who live in our neighborhood and around the world who are desperate to provide food for their families and recognize there are available jobs. And they will do anything to come to our country to work because they want to fight off the poverty and starvation that has affected their loved ones.

It's a powerful incentive to be a mom or a dad to make sure your children don't suffer. That's an incentive. That's an incentive for people here in America; it also happens to be an incentive for people around the world. And therefore, people will be willing to go to extra lengths to avoid border security.

They'll be willing to be crammed in the bottom of 18-wheelers. They fall prey to these *coyotes* who smuggle human beings to achieve profit.

When I say the system hadn't worked, the system hadn't worked to enforce our borders like we want. But the system was—also fostered illegal operations that prey upon the human being, and it's not in this Nation's interest that that continue to happen.

And finally, this bill goes to the heart of our values. We have proven that our Nation is capable of assimilating people. And I'm confident that we can continue to be a nation that assimilates. The bill recognizes that English is a part of the assimilation process and wants to help people learn the language in order to be able to take advantage of America.

You know, I've heard all the rhetoric—you've heard it too—about how this is amnesty. Amnesty means that you've got to [you don't have to] * pay a price for having been here illegally, and this bill does [doesn't do] * that. But it also recognizes it's in our Nation's interest to bring people out of the shadows, that there's got to be a way forward that recognizes there is a penalty for being here illegally—on the other hand, that recognizes that each person has got worth and dignity.

I love a country where people come with dreams and aspirations and through hard work can realize those dreams and aspirations. I'm struck every time I hear—I'm struck about our greatness every time I hear a story about a child taking advantage of a mother's or dad's hard work to realize the blessings of America. I was at the Coast Guard Academy—I've told this story several times—and the number-one cadet talked about his migrant grandfather. The fellow was a Mexican American—or is a Mexican American. The father came from—the grandfather came from Mexico to work hard so that, hopefully, someday, somebody in his family would realize the blessings of America. And it worked.

The country is better off, our soul is constantly renewed, our spirit is invigorated when people come here and realize the blessings of America. And so the bill that

we've worked hard to craft is an important piece of legislation that addresses the needs of a failed system, that says, we're going to change for the better.

I want to thank you all for working hard. We've got a couple of days of hard work ahead of us to get the bill through the first stage of the process, and then, of course, when successful in the Senate, we'll be reconvening to figure out how to get the bill out of the House. It's an important piece of legislation. It's an important time to act for the sake of the country.

Thanks for your time. God bless your efforts. God bless our country. Thank you. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:01 a.m. in Room 350 of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building.

Memorandum on Assignment of Functions Under Section 1035 of the John Warner National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2007

June 26, 2007

Memorandum for the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense

Subject: Assignment of Functions Under Section 1035 of the John Warner National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2007

By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and laws of the United States, including section 301 of title 3, United States Code, I hereby assign to the Secretary of Defense the functions of the President under section 1035 of the John Warner National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2007 (Public Law 109-364). The Secretary of State, and the heads of other executive departments and agencies identified in the report required under section 1035, should concur with the report.

The Secretary of Defense is authorized and directed to publish this memorandum in the *Federal Register*.

George W. Bush

* White House correction.